

reveal. Without the support and the assistance of members, who though not expressly interested in the scientific side of this publication, have nevertheless contributed financially to its production, the great work that the Society has done and is now doing could not have been achieved.

In the present issue of the Journal we have introduced at the suggestion of an old and valued friend of the Society a new feature—a page or two of answers to questions, received during the last few months—questions which are of general interest and which may incidentally help to strengthen the contact between ourselves and our readers. Our daily correspondence is not only large but infinitely varied. The reading of it produces feelings as diverse as the changing colours of our pet Chamæleon who regards us with a contemplative eye from his perch opposite our table. We register joy, repentance, sorrow and occasionally a praiseworthy esteem for ourselves. Among other matters of routine we are called upon to settle bets, to clinch arguments and to assist cross-word enthusiasts in distress! Occasionally we are faced with problems of an intriguing nature: 'What is the name of a blue fish I saw in the Red Sea?' This is a classic example. But very often we receive questions of general interest. A selection of these we propose to publish in our correspondence page, prefixed with the initials of the sender. There are many questions which would elicit we believe more complete information by their ventilation in the pages of the Journal. The problems connected with the introduction of legislation for the protection of Monitor Lizards in Bengal is an instance in point. What is the normal food of the various species of Monitor Lizards? At what time of the year do they breed? How large do they grow before they attain maturity?

PROTECTION OF MONITOR LIZARDS

The action of the Bengal Government in placing a ban on the destruction of these lizards has been the subject of congratulation and, on the other hand, of protest from those interested in the trade in Lizard skins. Further information on the points we have raised would be instrumental in the settlement of a question which financially affects a not inconsiderable number of people in Bengal.

The Government notification refers to these lizards as Iguanas (vern. *Go-shap*). The answer to a question raised in our correspondence page in the present number may be helpful in removing the misconception that Iguanas are found in India. The vernacular term *Go-shap* is again commonly used for a number of lizards not intended to be protected under the terms of the notification. Four species of Monitor Lizards occur in Bengal:—The Common Monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*), generally distributed throughout India, the Water Monitor (*V. savator*), mainly aquatic in habit, the Yellow Monitor (*V. flavescens*) and the Clouded Monitor (*V. nebulosus*), an uncommon species. The Yellow, the Common and the Water Monitors mainly furnish the demands of the trade in lizard skins. In view of the interests involved it is too much to hope that

legislation for their protection could be introduced without protest from the trade.

As a plea for their protection, it has been advanced that these lizards are largely instrumental in destroying snakes, rats and other vermin. On the other hand it has been pointed out that Monitor Lizards—the Water Monitor for example—are destructive to poultry, fishes and are in fact a positive nuisance to villagers in the Sunderbans, while their reputed effectiveness as an agent in the destruction of snakes is largely hypothetical. In view of the fact that there is very little known about the normal food of the Water Monitor, the contention would be difficult to positively refute. Observation has shown that the Water Monitor is very partial to birds' eggs. A Water Monitor kept in the New York Zoo would take eight to ten hens' eggs at a meal, swallowing them entire with astonishing rapidity. It has been observed eating turtles' eggs, and it may be reasonably assumed that it would also eat the eggs of other reptiles. Whether live snakes, harmless or otherwise, form a considerable portion of its diet is largely a matter of conjecture. Experiments have shown that the Common Monitor succumbs to the venom of a cobra. Two experiments recorded by Fayrer indicate that Monitor Lizards die after being bitten by this snake, one individual surviving for 28 hours and the other for a slightly shorter time. A 14-foot king cobra was recently killed in Burma while swallowing a 4' 6" Water Monitor, and a note in our Journal records one being taken from the stomach of a Python. It is apparent that these lizards occasionally form the prey of large snakes and it is equally probable, from the omnivorous nature of their diet, that they would not be above attacking and devouring any snakes which could be readily overcome. The Common Monitor feeds to a large extent on small mammals, young birds and their eggs. We know from experience that they can be very destructive in a poultry yard. It is on the other hand an excellent ratter destroying large numbers of field rats and must in consequence have a distinct economic value in agricultural districts. This alone would afford a plea for its protection.

The effective provision of a close season for particular periods of the year would be a matter of difficulty, unless efficient means were also introduced to prevent the possibility and the probability of the reservation for sale at a more convenient period of skins secured during the 'close time'?

It has also been suggested that a size limit should be imposed and that no lizards should be killed below a stated size. For the Water Monitor and the Clouded Monitor the limit suggested is 4 and 3 feet respectively. For the Common Monitor and the Yellow Monitor the limit proposed is 2 feet 6 inches. Protection in this instance to be really effective must cover the limits of size at which these lizards actually breed, as this would enable a larger number to attain maturity and to reproduce their young. In discriminating between the various species and fixing the limits below which they are to be protected, it would be pertinent to inquire whether the size at which they attain maturity has been correctly ascertained. Again where the habitats of the various species

overlap, as they often do, there would arise the difficulty of the villagers being able to distinguish between the different species,—not a simple matter even in museum specimens.

It is possible that the action of the Government of Bengal in placing a total ban on the killing of these lizards in the light of our present inadequate knowledge, has been to some extent premature and the suggestions put forward by the trade for the modification of Government's ruling may be provisionally adopted pending an enquiry into the facts. Such an enquiry under the guidance of a competent zoologist would be able to determine whether the various species of monitors have been appreciably reduced in numbers during recent years and whether any of the species are now threatened with extinction. A careful enquiry into the present extent of the trade and a comparison of the average numbers of skins of different species obtained from various provinces over a number of years may throw light on these points. The normal food of the various species, their breeding season and the size at which they attain maturity, are also points for investigation.

MYSORE'S NEW GAME LAWS

The question of protective legislation brings us to the recent amendments to the Game Laws of the Mysore State. The report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the existing conditions of game in the country reveals that there has been an appreciable depletion of game in the State in recent years, due to a natural increase in the population and to other causes more preventible. Poaching has been, as elsewhere in India, largely responsible for the decimation of game in the State forests and the decision of the Mysore Government to secure the co-operation of village shikaries in putting down poaching might, with advantage, be more generally adopted, provided the rewards are made substantial enough to induce this fraternity of professional sportsmen to give information on every occasion and, what is more important, to forego their own assumed rights as privileged offenders. Good rewards to subordinates of the Forest, Police and other departments will probably provide a check in the latter instance. Facilities for the entry of a greater number of sportsmen into the jungles of the State would be one of the most effective means of checking poaching. This, as has been pointed out to us, is proved to a remarkable degree in the shooting blocks of the Coimbatore and Kollegal forest divisions. The abolition of the system whereby blocks were taken by visitors for a whole year and the introduction of a system whereby blocks are rented for a period of one month only at a time, has resulted in the forests being much more frequently visited. At the outset the ruling met with a good deal of opposition on the grounds that the frequent entry of sportsmen would reduce the game in the reserves. The frequent visits of sportsmen to the shooting blocks and the deterrent thereby provided against would-be poachers has resulted, however, in a distinct increase in game in the forests of these divisions. Invariably more game falls to the gun and traps of the poacher than is accounted for by legitimate and regulated shooting.